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SUBJECT: TURKS HEAR DIALOGUE, BUT NO ACTION FROM KRG

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (c) Summary: In follow-up talks here the week of October 21, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials offered to create a propaganda campaign to counter and discredit the PKK pursuant to a written, Turkey-KRG agreement to be signed by PM Erdogan and KRG President Barzani that would effectively anoint the latter as leader of all Kurds, including Turkey's own. The KRG officials apparently discussed no practical steps their authorities are prepared to take directly against the PKK, such as interdicting its movements or quarantining its encampments. Turkish MP Mehmet Cicek and Deputy PM Cemil Cicek rejected the demand of political recognition and reiterated their insistence on action, not words, by the Iraqi Kurds. DPM Cicek also asked for US help with the Turkish soldiers being held by the PKK in northern Iraq. End Summary.

12. (c) Further to reftel, KRG Prime Ministry chief of staff Sawraz Hawrami briefed Ambassador on October 23 regarding his latest discussions with Turkish parliamentarian Mehmet Cicek. Hawrami repeated many points he made earlier. He called the PKK a terrorist organization and said the KRG does not want to allow it to come between the KRG and the US or between it and Turkey. He commented, however, on gripes that Barzani has toward Turkey, including chauvinism by the government "despite the support he voiced for the AKP" during last summer's electoral campaign and the "tribal" moniker officials here have applied to him increasingly in recent months. Hawrami also repeated the canard that the Turkish army likes having a PKK problem in order to justify its political role in Turkish society and help sustain its budgets. He brought up the case of PKK finance chief Riza Altun, who fled from France via Austria to northern Iraq earlier this year. According to Hawrami, Altun arrived at Irbil under an assumed name using a European passport. Had the authorities known it was Altun, he would have been placed under arrest.

13. (c) Despite all this, Hawrami said, the KRG wants to be helpful against the PKK. He apparently told the Turks that Barzani is prepared to create a propaganda campaign that would focus on discrediting the PKK in the eyes of Kurds everywhere. Through such an approach, the KRG would be better able to control PKK activities, to shrink the organization, and eventually get it out of the terrorism business. This solution to the PKK problem, he maintained, goes through the KRG, not through Iraq, Iraqi Interior Minister Bolani or the CT agreement concluded in September. KRG authorities are ready to cooperate on this, but to do so there must be a written accord between the KRG and Turkey that Barzani and PM Erdogan should sign.

14. (c) Ambassador repeated many of his earlier observations, as well. He hailed KRG efforts at dialogue and said he hopes

it continues. He said it is wrong to think that the army here benefits by PKK violence and wants it around. He made clear that the PKK attacks of October 21 had made more dangerous an already bad situation. The next several days are critical, and the fact that Turkish soldiers are being held hostage in northern Iraq by the PKK raises the stakes even further. While one cannot predict what Turkish security forces may do, if they locate the soldiers, they seem likely to attempt a rescue. Irbil should not overreact if that happens.

15. (c) Ambassador cautioned against highlighting political commitments, words or pledges with the Turks. Rather than seeking recognition, the Iraqi Kurds should first seek to generate trust among their northern neighbors whose help and support Iraqi Kurds need over the long term. Active steps against the PKK will demonstrate that the KRG is on Ankara's side against the PKK, and only these can lead to the kind of relationship that Barzani apparently seeks. Ambassador reiterated previous comments about steps the KRG could take against PKK logistics, against PKK movements and to support the Turkey-Iraq CT accord. He emphasized that time is now very short. He appreciated Hawrami's account of Reza Altun's arrival at Irbil, but a simple step that would be appropriate now is to issue an arrest warrant for him and seek his detention.

16. (c) Ambassador met subsequently and separately with both Mehmet Cicek and his cousin, Turkish Deputy PM and Counterterrorism Board chair Cemil Cicek. Both were uncompromising, if also somewhat disappointed that Mehmet's unofficial dialogue had apparently produced nothing that could be remotely considered helpful to the political predicament the government here faces. Mehmet indicated that the door remains open for further discussion with Hawrami or

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possibly other KRG representatives, but made clear that tangible, active, on-the-ground measures are necessary.

17. (c) DPM Cemil Cicek showed that he was well-informed on his cousin's talks with Hawrami. He said Turkey believes that cooperation against the PKK should be on a state-to-state basis. What was therefore a complicated unofficial conversation with the KRG became harder when the KRG representatives clearly told the Turks to forget dealing with Baghdad and that Ankara must deal exclusively with them. Cicek indicated that Turkey is not prepared to do this. At this point, negotiating with the northern Iraqi authorities is tantamount to negotiating with terrorists. Cicek urged in blunt terms that the US, and the Iraqis with US encouragement, should come up active steps now to deal with the PKK, or Turkey will do so itself. Cicek said he cannot understand how, if we demand that Barzani take certain steps against the PKK, he can refuse. If Secretary Rice cannot get results from him, what does the US advise Turkey to do? This country does not want chaos in the region, but does not want its people to die, either. It needs to show the Turkish people results ) either through diplomatic efforts with us, the Iraqis and perhaps others, or through military means.

18. (c) DPM Cicek also expressed awareness of a private effort in northern Iraq to help secure the return of Turkish soldiers being held there by the PKK. He regarded it as credible and urged that the US try urgently to explore what its prospects may be and, if possible, get the Turkish soldiers back. This could be a good first step in a new phase of US-Turkish cooperation on the PKK, Cicek declared. Ambassador said we had been a little skeptical of the bona fides of this effort, but would energize our efforts and keep the Turks posted.

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